

District 4 election to cost \$1.2 million

Montgomery County Board of Elections officials updated the County Council on the need for \$1.2 million more to the budget.

The Feb. 12 primary election went well despite icy weather, election board officials said.

County News

However, the board requested \$1.2 million in supplemental funds to cover the added costs of the primary election and the special election on May 13 for the fourth council district to replace the late Councilwoman Marilyn J. Praisner.

The election board had to train an additional 3,200 election judges for the presidential primary in February.

— C. BENJAMIN FORD

Child welfare calls grow

The number of investigations conducted by Montgomery County's Child Welfare Services grew sharply in January, probably as a response to the publicity surrounding the deaths of four young girls in Washington, health and human resource officials told a County Council committee Monday.

There were 103 cases of physical abuse against children in January in Montgomery County, the most recent figure available, which was about 55 percent higher than the monthly average. There were also 144 allegations of neglect against children, about 35 percent higher than the monthly average.

Uma Ahluwalia, director of the Department of Health and Human Services, said it appears the rise was due to increased awareness of child abuse because of the tragedy involving a Washington family.

The skeletal remains of four girls were found in their home in January and their mother, Banita

Jacks, was charged with their killings.

District officials have faulted different agencies for letting the family fall through the cracks.

While the county's Child Welfare Services is working very well, no one can prevent tragedies from happening, Ahluwalia said.

The county had already been in the process of integrating different services to help speed up the process for families in need and to allow for better coordination, she said.

— C. BENJAMIN FORD

Fire and rescue reaches agreement with county

For the second time, Montgomery County volunteer fire and rescue personnel have reached agreement with county officials on issues including insurance and benefits as part of a three-year collective bargaining contract.

The agreement, signed Thursday, between a volunteer group and government agency is the only one of its kind. The county pioneered this type of agreement three years ago, and has since received national attention.

"This is an historical agreement that provides many opportunities, benefits and protections for the professional volunteer men and women of our county," said Marcine D. Goodloe, the association's president, in a release.

Included in this agreement are requirements for the county's fire department to advance the training, equipment and protection of volunteers. Health insurance provisions, volunteer recognition disciplinary procedures and benefits are also covered by the deal which comes after five months of negotiations.

The volunteer association represents about 1,540 volunteer personnel in 19 departments throughout the county.

— JANEL DAVIS